

RECOVR Roundup Vol. 4: Social Protection in the Time of COVID-19

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In this fourth installment of our RECOVR Roundup series, we are sharing new findings and analysis from the [RECOVR Research Hub](#) and from our partner organizations—as well as links on what is happening in the Social Protection landscape in response to COVID-19. Read the [first](#), [second](#), and [third](#) installment if you missed them, and [sign up for our mailing list](#) if you'd like to receive this roundup series directly to your inbox.

New Findings & Analysis

Ethiopia: The global reach of the pandemic

Female garment industry workers experience drops in employment and food security

Christian Johannes Meyer, Morgan Hardy, Marc Witte, Gisella Kagy, and Eyoual Demeke [show the ripple effects of the pandemic in a globalized economy](#). They surveyed almost 4,000 women working in the country's massive Hawassa industrial park and found that with orders drying up, more than 41 percent had been let go. With over 90 percent of them having no other work, many were food insecure. Out of options, many were returning to the villages they were from. The researchers make the case for insurance and social protection even in areas not hit by the virus.

Remote learning and mental health: How are students and parents in Latin America managing?

Mothers, especially of young children, bear the brunt of the burden

[A recent survey of 61,000 parents in El Salvador, Costa Rica, and Colombia](#) found that 85 percent of caregivers report at least one symptom of distress since the onset of the pandemic and remote learning. Eighty-four percent of mothers of young children report being involved in their children's distance education, compared with only 6 percent of fathers. Mothers were more likely to report every symptom of mental distress (sadness, lack of appetite, exhaustion, insomnia) than fathers were, but the gap is lower in homes where fathers helped with distance education. [A separate survey of 1,500 high school students in Ecuador](#) found that while most kids were happy, nearly 1 in 6 students had mental health

scores that indicate depression.

Highlights from the RECOVR Survey

Earlier this year, IPA surveyed about 13,000 people in 10 countries to assess how they were coping. Some recent findings below:

The Philippines: RECOVR Survey Reveals Priorities for Economic Recovery

Food security, economic well-being, and educational progress are top of mind for Filipinos

In the Philippines, IPA found that food security, economic well-being, and educational progress were top of mind for Filipinos. While promising inroads were made with new government assistance programs to cushion the economic impacts of the pandemic, the survey suggested more work was needed to address structural challenges with internet access, local labor market opportunities, and educational inequalities to promote long-term recovery.

Zambia: Learning from the RECOVR Survey to Identify Social Protection Priorities for an Inclusive and Equitable Recovery

Social protections for populations affected by the pandemic are key for growing the economy

In a survey of residents in Zambia, IPA found that educational continuity, economic well-being, and food security are critical issues amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Policymakers must contend with twin concerns of continuing to promote risk-mitigation to reduce community spread of the virus while designing an equitable economic recovery that addresses malnutrition, better incorporates informal workers into government assistance, and mitigates learning losses.

High Levels of Hunger and Food Insecurity in Nine Countries

Between 25 to 50 percent of households surveyed had to limit meal portions

The surveys took place between May and July 2020 in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Zambia, Colombia, Mexico, and the Philippines. The lowest levels of food insecurity were in Burkina Faso and Mexico, where 25 percent of respondents reported they had to reduce food consumption. In Rwanda it was more than 50 percent.

What We're Reading and Watching

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- **The U.S. Embassy in Uganda issued a strongly worded response to that government's decision to suspend GiveDirectly's \$10 million cash transfer program** funded by the U.S. meant to reach 120,000 Ugandans suffering from COVID-

related economic hardship. With the Ugandan government making that impossible, the U.S. will cancel the program. Here's a [story from September](#), when Uganda first suspended the program, and GiveDirectly's [response at the time](#).

- **In 2019 alone, remittances from workers abroad back home surpassed Foreign Direct Investment to reach \$554 billion, making it an important part of people's safety nets**, but are set to [contract by almost 20 percent](#) this year. Brookings argues for [including migrant workers in social protection programs](#) and extending visas so they can continue to work and send money home.
- *The Economist* argues that the **increase of contactless transactions, mobile wallets, and delivery of social protection programs through digital means brought on by COVID-19 has [profoundly accelerated digitization and banking worldwide](#)**.
- Indeed, **in Colombia, over 1.6 million adults opened a credit or savings account for the first time in the first six months of 2020**. Two new social protection programs, the VAT Refund and Solidarity Income, [played a major role in advancing this financial inclusion](#). (*Note: Report is in Spanish*)
- In case you missed it, check out **J-PAL's blog post on [considerations for digitizing government payments](#)** and **USAID's Medium post on [emerging lessons on digital cash transfers for COVID-19 relief](#)**.
- **[GiveDirectly is hiring a Research Director](#)** to head up its research on its big portfolio of cash transfer programs around the world.

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